

EQUALITY, POVERTY AND SOCIAL SECURITY**Research Findings**
No. 37/2019

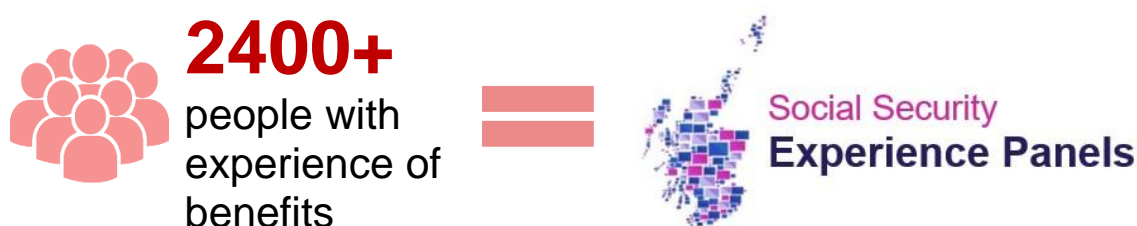
Social Security Experience Panels: Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for Children

Background

The Scottish Government is becoming responsible for some of the benefits currently delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).



To prepare for this change, the Scottish Government set up the **Social Security Experience Panels**.



Experience Panel members all have experience of **claiming at least one of the benefits coming to Scotland**.

The Scottish Government is working with Experience Panel members to design Scotland's new social security system.

About the research

This report gives the findings of the 'Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for Children' survey.

The research took place in

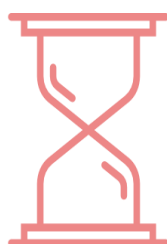


2018

The research explored:



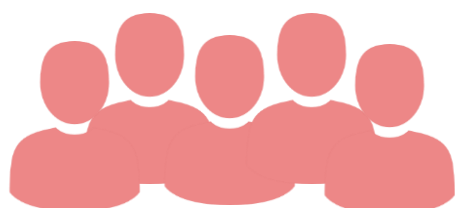
Respondent views on
applying for DLA for
Children



Where respondents
got information about
the benefit



Respondent views on
evidence gathering

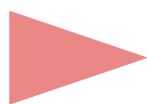


32

Experience Panel
members took part

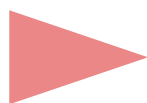
Finding out about DLA for Children

We asked respondents where they had found out about DLA for Children.



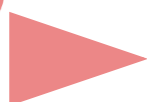
Half

through a doctor or health professional



A few

through a friend or a family member



A few

through a support group

The rest found out **online**, through **DWP** or through **their child's school**.

Applying for DLA for Children

Respondents were asked to rate their experience of applying for DLA for Children.



A few

said they thought the application process was '**good**'



Some

said they thought the application process was '**average**'



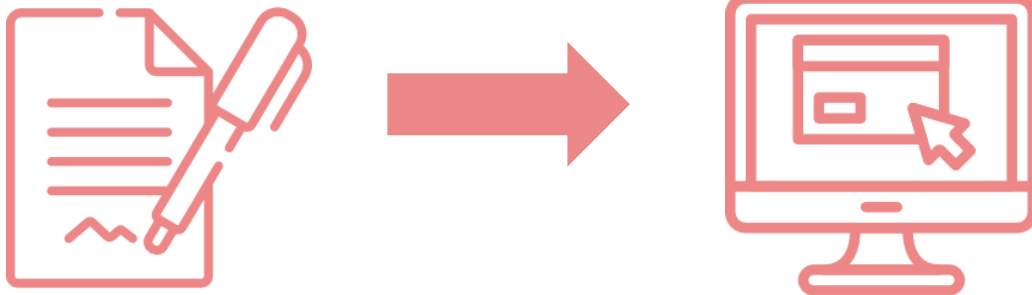
Most

said they thought the application process was '**poor**' or '**very poor**'

We asked respondents why they felt this way.

Some respondents said it was because they couldn't complete the whole application process online.

'Would be great to complete the whole application process online with an online account to save progress and submit evidence.'



Other respondents said that the application form itself was **complicated and not easy to understand**:



'[It's a] very large form which is very off-putting, [the] wording in questions is confusing or vague...'

Some respondents said that **filling in the form could be very upsetting** as they had to talk in detail about their child's health condition:

'The form requires you to think about all the things your child cannot do. It's soul destroying to have to write in black and white ink all the things that makes your child different...'



It was felt that the complexity of the form could ‘put people off applying’. A number of respondents said it was ‘too long’ and felt it tried to ‘trick you’.

Other respondents said the experience was negative because it was difficult to gather evidence:

‘It can be very difficult to get ‘evidence’. You are given no help or advice on how to gather it. If you are not in frequent touch with specialists (as people often aren’t due to waiting lists and lack of services) then you have nothing.’

We asked respondents if they would like the option to apply online.



Almost all respondents said they would want this, or would like the option to do this.

Almost no respondents said they would not want the option to apply online.

Respondents said that applying online would give them ‘**more choice**’ and felt it would ‘**make the process quicker**’.

Others felt that it was ‘**much easier to complete forms online**’ as they could edit and save as they went along.



The Scottish Government are currently developing an application process, which will be available online.

Finding information on DLA for Children

We asked respondents where they found information to help them apply for DLA for Children, and if this information was useful to them.

Respondents gave different examples of where they had found information, including:



Respondents told us that, on the whole, they found the advice they received helpful. **Online advice services were said to be particularly useful.**

A small number of respondents said the advice was not helpful, and in some cases made the application process seem even more complicated.

Improving the application process

We asked respondents what Social Security Scotland's priority should be for improving the DLA for Children application process.

Some respondents said that the entire application process should be redesigned, as they felt that it was all bad.

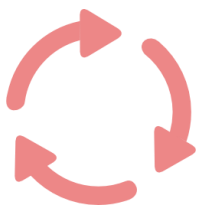
Respondents who gave specific answers suggested improving the application form, information provided to applicants, and the policy on award lengths:



'The form is daunting, especially if your child has variable needs.'



'Access to information and support to help fill in the forms...'



'Children with lifetime conditions shouldn't need to reapply every three years...'

Some respondents felt that **having to provide every detail of their child's lives was 'exhausting'** and that parents 'should be trusted not to make it up'.

Others felt that **the application form was 'tailored to physical disability'** and should instead cover all health conditions.

Supporting Evidence

Respondents were asked what supporting evidence they supplied alongside their DLA for Children application.

Many said they sent in **'all they could find'**.

This typically included medical reports and statements from their child's school.



Many respondents said they **found it difficult to gather this evidence**.



They said that their doctors or health professionals **'had no time'** to write reports or **'didn't see the child often enough'** to put down enough detail.

Other respondents said they did not receive copies of all the letters about their child, and **had to submit a Subject Access Request to get access to their child's records**.

In the future, **Social Security Scotland may be able to collect supporting evidence for applicants** so they do not have to do this themselves.

Respondents were mostly positive about this suggestion.



They said it would '**simplify the process**' and that it would '**save a lot of time**'.

Some respondents raised concerns around the **use of their data and wanted to see what would be sent to the agency beforehand**.

'I would want to be able to see what evidence was going to be provided before it was sent.'

Others wanted to ensure that consent was sought from applicants before data sharing occurred:

'Consent must be sought and individuals should be able to say if they have a preference as to who should be contacted.'

Contacting DWP

Respondents were asked if they had ever contacted DWP to tell them about a change of circumstances.

Respondents generally felt that the process of reporting a change of circumstances was acceptable, however a few respondents raised concerns.



‘Sitting on the phone for ages to get through...’

‘Relatively easy but a long time hanging on phone calls...’

When asked how the process could be improved, most respondents didn't have any suggestions. Those who did suggested a simplified process and **being able to report simple changes online**.

Transitioning from DLA to PIP

Currently, once a child turns 16 they transition from DLA to Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

We asked respondents if they felt 16 was the right age to transfer from DLA to **PIP**.



Almost all respondents felt that 16 was not the right age to transition. It was suggested that 18 was a more suitable age.

Transitioning to PIP at 16 was seen to be ‘an extra stress on the parents’ and many thought that children were still too young at 16 to move on to PIP.

Respondents suggested that 18 was more ‘**age appropriate**’ and that an extra two years would ‘**give the parent more time to teach their child about their benefits**’.

Many respondents still disagreed however and said they would prefer the age of transition to be 20.



The Scottish Government will be increasing the age that DLA for Children can be received from 16 up to 18.

Beyond the Experience Panels

We also spoke to people who weren't on the Experience Panels. This allowed us to talk to a broader range of people who had experience of DLA for Children.

We heard that for some people, there was a stigma around applying for benefits that made them reluctant to claim. For other people, we heard that they made assumptions about their eligibility that weren't always true – for example, some said they felt that because they were working they wouldn't be entitled to claim.



'Everybody said to us we'd be entitled to it but we didn't know.'

We also heard that some families found it difficult to apply for the benefit at all because they could not read, write or use computers, or speak English.

'One of the families I helped apply for DLA for a child have limited English and very little literacy skills...'

When people did apply, we heard that they found the application form difficult to complete and that it asked too many questions.

'Questionnaire is HUGE...I work with a lot of people who are anxious, or have mental health difficulties, and they're put off by the form...'

People were also unclear on what evidence they should provide whilst claiming – some told us they didn't know what DWP were looking for.

What's Next

This research will inform the ongoing design and development of Disability Living Allowance for Children in Scotland.

The Scottish Government will continue to work with the Experience Panels in designing Scotland's new social security system.



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